DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 269 PS 019 842

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TITLE Parents Hold a Key to "The Land of Opportunity."
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Seattle, WA, April 18-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletics; *Beliefs; Childhood Interests; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Fathers; Mothers; *Music; *Opportunities; *Parent Influence; *Sex Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors that influence parents' provision of opportunity for their children. In particular, it focused on the roles of the sex of the parent and the child in the provision of opportunities in two sex-stereotyped domains, sports and music. Data were collected from about 500 mothers and 300 fathers of second, third, and fifth graders. Items assessing parents' beliefs about their child and themselves that were relevant to a particular domain were factor analyzed. Parents indicated the extent of: (1) the child's involvement; (2) the parent and child's involvement together; and (3) parents' encouragement in the areas of sports and music. The results indicate that both sex of parent and sex of child influence parental provision of opportunities. The Eccles and others (1983) model of parental influence was supported in that the effects of child sex, in particular, and parent sex, to some degree, were mediated by the parents' perceptions of the child. Implications for further research are stated. A figure outlines Eccles' and others' influence model. Two figures concerning other models and three references are also appended. (Author/GLR)

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Parents Hold a Key to "The Land of Opportunity"

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PS 019842

Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Seattle, April, 1991.

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OVERVIEW

Parents play an early formative role in their children's development by encouraging children to pursue some activity options while discouraging or ignoring other possible choices. Parents may do this, in part, by providing certain opportunities and materials for their youngsters. Research (e.g., Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988) suggests that the opportunity structure, including toys, books, equipment, and exposure to various activities, that is available to a child, can play a primary causal role in the child's development and contribute to the child's abilities in those activity domains. Work by Eccles and her colleagues (e.g., Eccles (Parsons), 1984; Eccles (Parsons), Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983) also documents the important role of parents' provision of opportunities and encouragement.

This study examines the factors that influence parental provision of opportunity. In particular, it focuses on how parent sex and child sex play a determining role in the provision of opportunities in two sex-stereotyped domains, sports and music. The parent influence model proposed by Eccles et al. (Figure 1) suggests that the effect of sex is most important as it is mediated by the parents' perceptions of the child.

METHOD

Participants

Data were collected in the spring of 1989 from approximately 500 mothers and 300 fathers of children in the second, third, and fifth grades as part of a larger four-year study investigating the development of children's achievement self-perceptions. Children attended public school in four middle income districts in primarily white suburbs of a large metropolitan city.

Measures

Parent Domain Beliefs postulated to mediate between exogenous variables and opportunity structure variables:

Items assessing parent beliefs about their child and themselves relevant to a particular domain were factor analyzed. A five-factor solution in each domain emerged with parallel factors: 1) Parents' perceptions of child's ability, importance, and interest; 2) Parents' general beliefs about domain importance; 3) Parents' child-specific beliefs about domain importance; 4) Parents' perceptions of their own domain aptitude, and 5) Parents' perceptions of child's worry about domain. Factor scores were computed for each of the five mediators.

Parent Provision of Opportunities within each domain:

Parents indicated the extent of the child's involvement as well as the parent and child's involvement together, and parent encouragement in each of the areas. The final two dependent variables were computed using factor analyses and providing factor scores for two constructs in both domains: 1) Parent direct opportunity provision and 2) parent indirect opportunity provision.

RESULTS

First-order effects of parent sex and child sex on Provision of Opportunities:

Initially a series of 2 X 2 (sex of child X sex of parent) ANOVAs were analyzed using data from the Year 2 on a broad range of domains. Results indicated that mothers and fathers stress involvement in different domains and are involved differentially with girls and boys across domains (see Table 1). There were no significant interaction effects. Items pertaining to Music and Sports were reanalyzed for data from Year 3 and results were in the same direction and of the same magnitude.

Parent Influence Model:

A path analytic approach was then employed to assess the relative size of the effects of parent sex and child sex on parent direct and indirect provision of opportunities in music and in sports. The effects of child's grade level and parents' educational level were statistically controlled. Possible interaction effects on opportunity factors were examined.

Sex of Child Effect:

In both domains, the effect of sex on parents active/direct promotion was entirely mediated. Of most importance in both music and sports was parent perception of child's ability, importance, and interest. In comparing domains, however, sex of child was related to opportunity provision in a stereotyped way, with parents more actively promoting girls involvement in music as mediated by their perception that girls have a greater interest and ability in music. In contrast, parents were more directly involved in provision of sports opportunities for their child as mediated by their perception that boys hold more interest and have more ability in sports.

Sex of child had a direct influence on indirect promotion of sports involvement, with both mothers and fathers taking boys more often to sporting events and buying sports books. In the music domain, child's sex had an indirect effect on indirect opportunity provision, mediated by parent belief in the value of music for girls.

Sex of Parent Effect:

In music, there is no effect for sex of parent. In sports, however, there are both direct and mediated effects of sex of parent on his/her direct opportunity provision.

Fathers are more involved with their children (holding constant any parent perceptions) in terms of direct opportunity provision. Half of the total effect of sex of parent on direct opportunity provison, however, is mediated. Parents who perceive themselves as having more aptitude in sports are more likely to provide direct opportunities, and we find that it is fathers who tend to feel they have more aptitude for sports. In addition, parents who think their child is more interested, and able in sports, and who have stronger general beliefs about the importance of being good at sports, also tend to be more actively involved in directly promoting sports. Here we find that it is mothers who tend to rate their children's talent as higher and the importance of being good at sports as higher.

On the whole, there is no sex of parent effect on the indirect provision of opportunities. However, upon closer examination of the path coefficients, we find that fathers who tend to perceive themselves as more athletic and better at sports are more involved in the indirect promotion of sports, such as taking children to sports games. When this aptitude self-perception is held constant, then mothers are more involved in the indirect promotion of children's sports involvement.

CONCLUSIONS

First order effects in both the music and sport domains show that sex of parent and sex of child influence parental provision of opportunities. The proposed theoretical model is supported in that the effects of child sex, in particular, and parent sex, to some degree, are mediated by the parents' perceptions of the child. These perceptions appear to influence parents to provide opportunities in sex-stereotyped ways with music seen as more of a female domain and sports as more of a male domain.

The next step will be to look at how these opportunities, both direct and indirect, may be influencing the children's perception of their own abilities in each domain, the value they attach to them, and their decision to engage in domain-specific activities.

References

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Figure 1
Model of Parental Influences

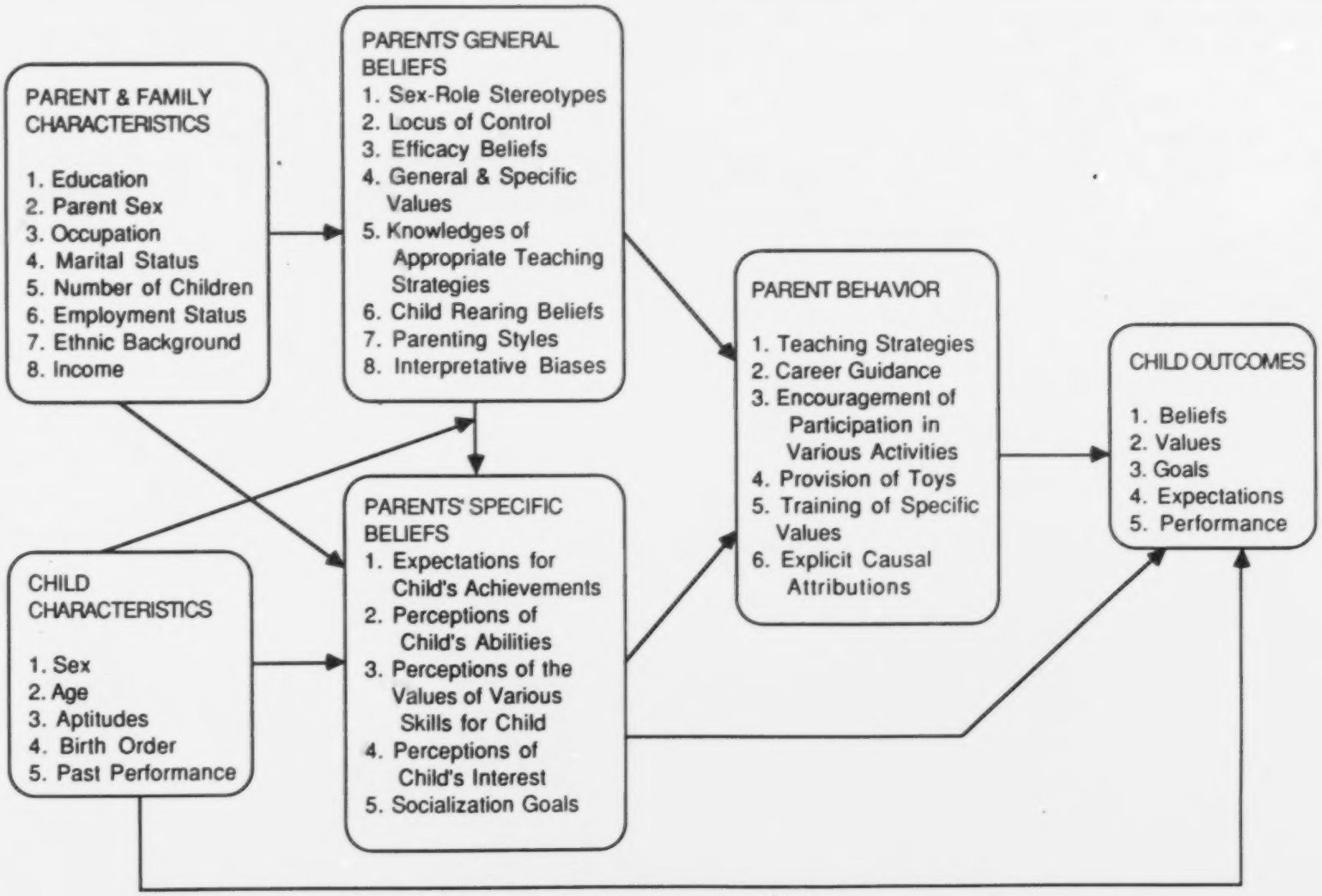


Table 1

Mean Ratings of Parental Time Use and Encouragement by Sex of Parent and Sex of Child

Item	Mo $\bar{X}$	Fa $\bar{X}$	Parent Main Effect	Girl $\bar{X}$	Boy $\bar{X}$	Gender Main Effect
Work with child on computer	1.73	1.95	F=7.76**	1.76	1.89	F=4.14*
Play computer games with child	1.73	2.13	F=26.71***	1.73	2.04	F=17.79***
Help child do homework	3.95	3.38	F=26.71***			
Read to child	3.95	3.21	F=40.68***			
	(3.46	2.73	F=44.69***)			
Play sports with child	2.69	3.54	F=62.38***	2.72	3.37	F=38.07***
	(2.59	3.52	F=95.48***	2.70	3.23	F=30.25***)
Do art projects with child	2.55	2.08	F=38.47***	2.46	2.28	F=7.27*
Play musical instrument with child	1.57	1.38	F=6.30*			
	(1.67	1.33	F=19.52***)			
Check child's homework	4.14	3.41	F=37.34***			
Do active outdoor activities with child	3.40	3.44	F=26.58***	3.40	3.42	F=8.11**
Have child read to you	3.95	3.20	F=52.56***	3.76	3.55	F=4.84*
	(3.33	2.66	F=49.87***	3.17	2.94	F=5.8*)
Discuss child's experiences at school	5.84	5.39	F=79.51***			
Take child to a play	1.73	1.57	F=11.77***			
Take child to a classical music concert	1.28	1.18	F=9.03**			
	(1.30	1.24	F=4.4*)			

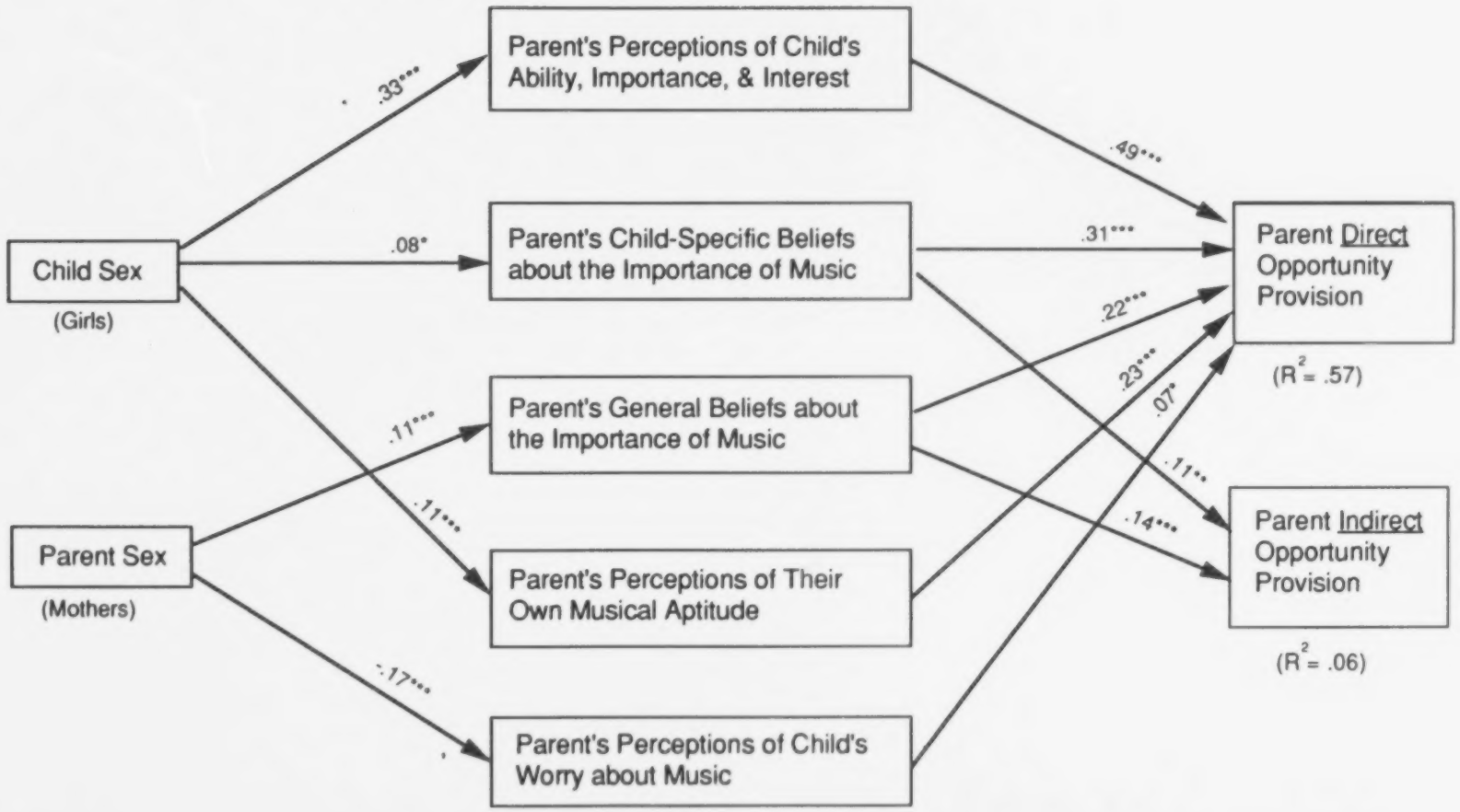
Note. *p <.05, **p <.01, p*** <.001.
Items in parenthesis indicate analyses that were replicated with Wave 3 data.

Table 1 (cont.)

Item	Mo $\bar{X}$	Fa $\bar{X}$	Parent Main Effect	Girl $\bar{X}$	Boy $\bar{X}$	Gender Main Effect
Take child to paid sports event	1.73	1.81	F=4.89*	1.61	1.91	F=53.14***
Help child prepare for exams	3.69	3.01	F=46.98***			
Discuss current events with child	3.99	3.39	F=30.74***			
Encourage child to build and make things				5.22	5.64	F=24.05***
Encourage child to play competitive sports	4.64	4.90	F=10.74***	4.43	5.08	F=66.43***
Enourage child to play noncompetitive sports	5.44	5.14	F=10.40***	5.16	5.50	F=17.74***
Encourage child to do math/ science related activities				4.78	5.04	F=11.44***
Encourage child to watch sports on TV				3.97	4.29	F=24.19***
Encourage child to read	6.46	6.11	F=31.93***	6.41	6.20	F=12.41***
Encourage child to take music lessons				4.75	4.47	F=10.48***
Encourage child to take dance lessons	4.43	4.27	F=5.03*	4.77	3.94	F=120.24**
Encourage child to have friends over to the house	5.84	5.46	F=23.63**	5.77	5.59	F=6.15*

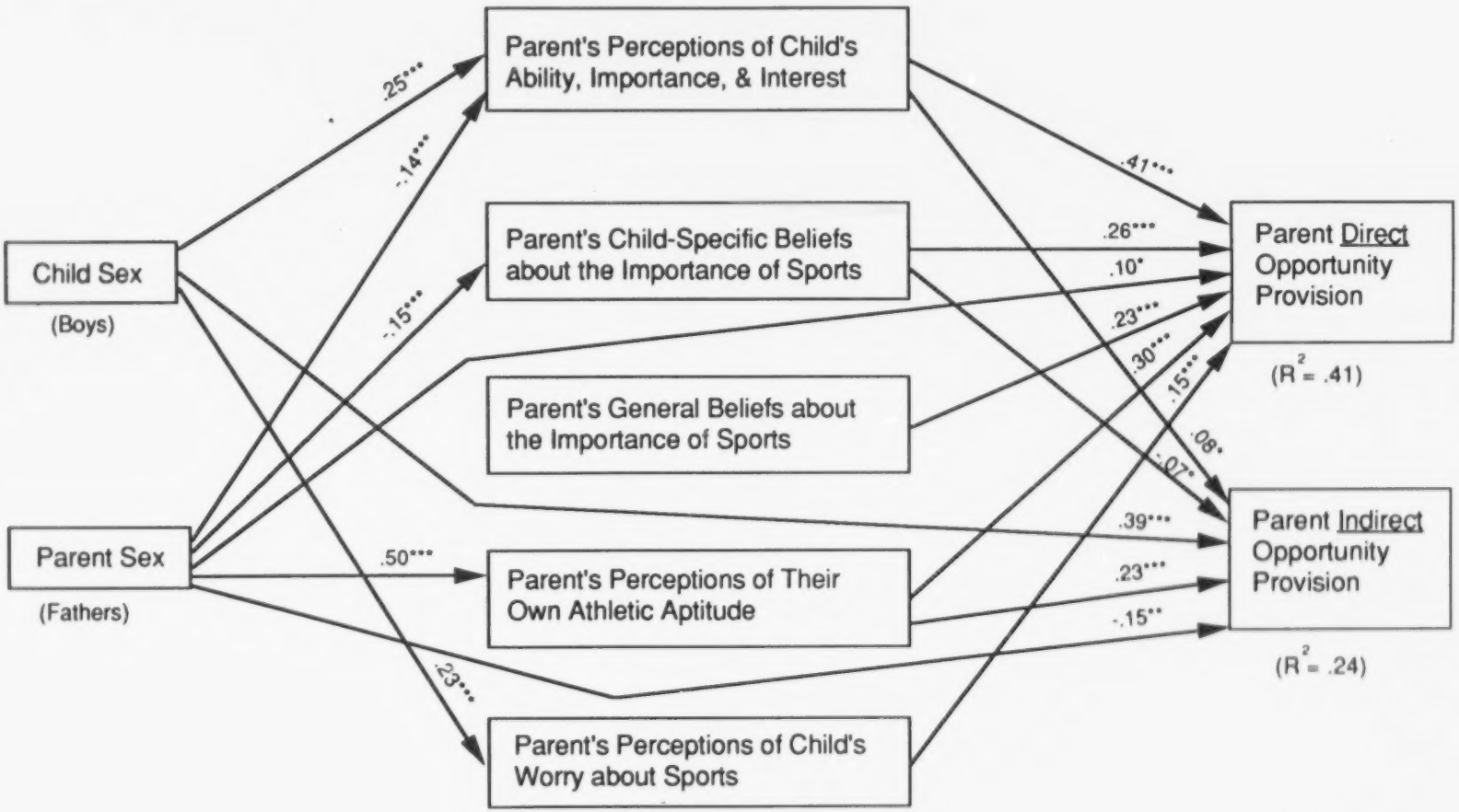
Note. *p <.05, **p <.01, p*** <.001.
Items in parenthesis indicate analyses that were replicated with Wave 3 data.

FIGURE 2:
PATH MODEL OF OPPORTUNITY PROVISION IN MUSIC



Note: Path arrows from child's grade and parents' educational level are not shown here in order to simplify the model.
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

FIGURE 3:
PATH MODEL OF OPPORTUNITY PROVISION IN SPORTS



Notes: Path arrows from child's grade and parents' educational level are not shown here in order to simplify the model.
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001